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The Swap

In September 1961, Castro cops burst into a room in Havana's Seguro Médico (Medical Insurance) Building. They found three Americans—Daniel Carswell of Eastchester, N.Y., Eustace Danbrunt of Baltimore, and Edmund Taransky of New York City—surrounded by electronic listening devices. All three were agents of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency. And they were bugging the newly opened Havana headquarters of Hsinhua, a Communist Chinese "news" agency. The CIA men were arrested and sentenced to ten years in Castro's dungeons.

Off the Hook. Last week all three, along with 18 other Americans held by Castro for various reasons, were back in the U.S. In a swap negotiated by New York Lawyer (and unsuccessful 1962 Democratic nominee for the Senate) James B. Donovan, the U.S. gave up four Castro thugs. Three had been caught in a plot to start tossing sabotage bombs around New York. The fourth, Francisco ("The Hook") Molina del Rio, 31, was the one the U.S. most disliked to let go. A pro-Castro gunman, he got into a shooting melee with anti-Castro Cubans in a New York restaurant during Castro's visit to the U.S. in 1960. In the process, he inadvertently killed a nine-year-old Venezuelan girl, Magdalena Urdaneto. Molina was convicted of second-degree murder and sentenced to 20 years to life. But at the request of the Federal Government that he act "in the national interest," New York's Governor Nelson Rockefeller commuted Molina's sentence, sent the killer back to Cuba—with the threat that if The Hook ever again set foot on U.S. soil, he would spend the rest of his days behind bars.

The man behind Donovan in the prisoner swap was, as usual, Attorney General Robert Kennedy. Bobby felt deeply about the capture of the three CIA men—and he thought that Castro did not realize the importance of his catch. Said he, several months ago, to newsmen who

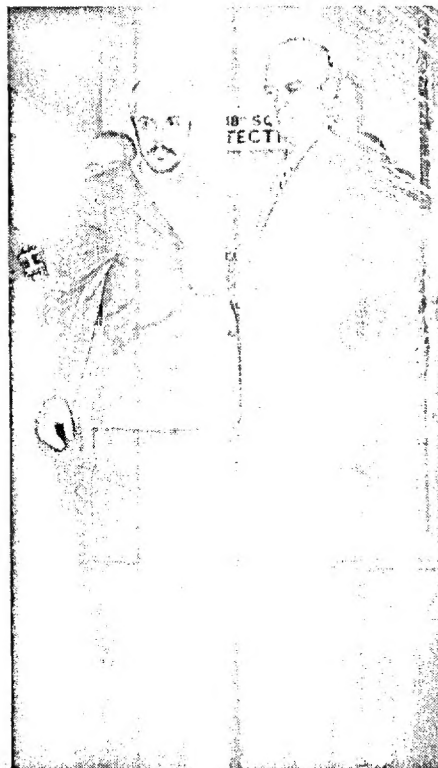


VICTIM MAGDALENA URDANETO
Caught in the crossfire.

had got wind of the agents' capture: "Men's lives are at stake. Castro can only guess who he's got—don't help him by publishing a story."

The Numbers Game. In that sense, the U.S. probably came out well ahead in dealing with Castro. But in the present state of U.S. sensitivity on the subject of Cuba, the swap could only cause controversy. And there was plenty of that already. For one thing, Bobby Kennedy, leaving a reception in Manhattan's Metropolitan Club, was giped at by a young Cuban exile for the U.S. crackdown on hit-and-run raids against Castro. Bobby turned on him, snapping that the exiles' action amounts to "spit in our eye."

For another thing, there was still a lively argument about Russian troops in Cuba. New York's Republican Senator Kenneth Keating had charged that there were upwards of 17,000—as many or more than at the height of last October's Cuba crisis. At his press conference, Presi-



Freed in the national interest.

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dent Kennedy was asked about Keating's statement. Said he: "It's our best information that 4,000 or 5,000 have left since January and that there has not been an equal number come in. In fact, much, much less—300 or 400 at most." Kennedy shrugged the whole argument off as being somehow irrelevant: "It's not, in my opinion, a grave question as to whether there's 17,000, 15,000, 13,000. There are still important elements on the island and there's still Soviet equipment on the island."*

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